

LIETUVIŲ ATGIMIMO ISTORIJOS STUDIJOS

9

Raimundas Lopata
Lietuvos valstybingumo raida
1914–1918 metais

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LITHUANIAN STATEHOOD IN 1914—1918

By Dr. R. LOPATA

SUMMARY

A theme about the statehood includes a lot of questions. It is possible to speak about the realization of the statehood, its ways, means and methods, about the evolution of the statehood idea, its formation, stagnation, decline and rebirth, finally about the concept itself as about mental being of the political society, as a synonym of the state, as, in general, about the elements of the state and about everything that is the state. According to the polysemantic meaning of the statehood concept it is used in the monograph in the meaning of the protectional (judicial) existence of a nation. We have chosen the question of the Lithuanian statehood from 1914 to 1918 as an object of our research and have discussed the models of the protectional (judicial) existence of a nation which had been matured by the Lithuanian politicians during World War I, its geopolitical character, ideological background, organizational structure and introduction into practice.

In the historical literature the genesis of the Lithuanian statehood 1914—1918 is linked with two factors: the geopolitical constellation and the peculiarities of the historical development of Lithuania. The latter are usually framed by the alternatives of national-peasant or Polish Lithuania (P. Klimas, Z. Ivinskis, B. Colliander, A. E. Senn, A. Eidintas, etc.). This premise is an especially characteristic feature of the national Lithuanian historiography and occurs as well in the works of the Soviet historians (B. Vaitkevičius, P. Vitkauskas), so it gives virtually no opportunity for the Lithuanian politicians of the 20th century to create the alternative ethnopolitical projects to Lithuania and complicates their analysis (P. Čepėnas, V. Trumpa). The other standpoint is represented by the historians who managed to perceive the alternatives of the historical process in Lithuania in a dichotomy of the national-peasant and civic Lithuania and who first of all derived the variety of the political orientation of the Lithuanians from it (M. Rōmeris, M. Biržiška, the Group of Studies of Lithuanian Rebirth History and with some reservations: Z. Jundziū, J. Bardach, J. Jurkiewicz, W. Sukiennicki). The representatives

of this historiographic group have used the historical-judicial and political-sociological sections that are applied in this book too.

The basis of the sources of the book is formed from the published collections of documents, memoirs of the politicians of that time, periodicals and archival material (diaries of the Lithuanian politicians, epistolary, protocols of the conferences, documents from the offices of Foreign Affairs of the Great Powers, etc.) preserved in archives of Lithuania, Russia, Great Britain, France and the USA.

The universally acknowledged geopolitical turning point of September, 1915 (O. Fedyshyn, K. Hovi, O. Hovi, D. Stevenson and others), became a criterion which stimulated the division of the book into two periods (the separate parts of the book): from June 1914 to September 1915 and from September 1915 to November 1918. In the first part the geostrategic visions of Europe, characteristic to the Continent at the second half of the 19th to the beginning of the 20th centuries, are discussed too.

Since the second half of the 19th century the nationalism of small nations in Eastern and Central Europe forced the Empires to find new ways to ensure the functioning of a legitimate system. It proved that such Europe as created by the Congress of Vienna could not exist longer without radical reforms.

One of the ways out appeared to be a national principle revealed by dependant communities for a protection of their ethnographic specifications. So with recognition of the status of an ethnic nation a tension between nationalism and legitimacy was reduced. The nationalism was given an opportunity for self-expression in a public (legal) way and legitimacy was quiet about its juridical monopoly, because at that time, according to the law, the ethnicity did not suppose a secession of the state.

The appliance of these clauses touched upon the former Polish Crown and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL). Seeking to eliminate a *restitutio in integrum* possibility of the abolished-by-force state, Russia and Germany tried to limit the Polish liberation movement in the territory of ethnographic Poland and supported the anti-Polish policy of each other in the North-Western region and the region of Poznań. In this case Russian administration while setting of the ethnography against the political aspirations of the noblemen of the country, tried to emerge the strata of Lithuanian-speaking subjects who were loyal to the Empire and persuade public opinion that Russia was the only successor of the statehood of the GDL.

The events of 1905 proved evidently that the Lithuanian national movement was an independent ethnopolitical power. The czarist authorities were forced to recognize the independence of the Lithuanian movement, furthermore the latter was off the influence of the Polish political life. And the Lithuanian question

itself, according to Russians, depended on the national problems that had to be solved based on a national principle. Such a Russian strategy influenced the orientations of the Lithuanian political world.

At the beginning of the 20th century in Lithuanian society it is conditionally possible to distinguish two political groups: on the one hand the Conservative (the Nationalists and Christian Democrats) and the Radical (the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party [LSDP] and the Lithuanian Democratic Party [LDP]) on the other. This construction was based on the common groundwork of an idea to reorganize the concrete community (Lithuanian) in the concrete country (Lithuania). The latter idea was expressed on the eve of the war by the requirement of political autonomy without hesitation that it would be only a step towards the independent state. This is evident, though it is not worth over-estimating. The problem was implicated by the historical-judicial ties with Poland and their consequences to Lithuania. In reality the galvanizing of these ties did not guarantee the sovereignty of Lithuania. For this reason the Lithuanians had to deviate into the water-way of Russian (later German) speculations and to find there an opportunity of compensation in an unfavourable relation Lithuania—Poland.

It is necessary to emphasize that different groups of Lithuanians had their own conception of this political course. The main disparity between them was that the Conservatives in their programme while combining the co-ordination of legal and national principles had not left a place for the historical-judicial tradition. Meanwhile the abstractional democratic programme of the Radicals softened the relation with that tradition.

When the war broke out the Petersburg—Berlin axis was ceased*. Both Empires sought to use the Polish movement for their own imperial purposes. Russia involved Poland's question into the programme of foreign policy based on the pan-Slavism doctrine (the programme of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs), which foresaw to liberalize the regime in the Vistula province and in the territories of Poznań and West Galicia annexed to it. In 1914—1915 the Russian government adopted its doctrine of pan-Slavism in the North-West region too. Provoking the ethnographical nationalism in its problems of internal and foreign policy it also tried to use the Lithuanian movement as an anti-Polish (the Proclamation of August 14, 1914, by the Commander-in-Chief) and anti-German (the project by general J. Zhilinskii, by ministers of Interior, Justice and Education) instrument. The Russian actions sharpened the relations in the political world of the Lithuanians.

* It concerns the common interests of the both Empires in the Polish question.

The Conservatives depended upon the strategic course of Russia. Covering themselves with bombastically declared loyalty they appealed to the separation of the ethnographic Lithuania and carefully rose the question about its future status in the context of autonomy in ethnographic Poland and annexation of Minor Lithuania to Great one (M. Yčas' speech in the session of the State Council and Duma, the "Amber Declaration" of August 17, 1914, the propaganda activity of J. Gabrys in the USA and Western Europe at the turn of 1914—1915). The Radicals were opposed to the tactics of accommodation with the Russian authorities, to the public pro-Russian orientation. They tried to initiate the slogan of autonomy, to advocate the decisions of the Great Vilnius Diet of 1905, to establish the group of supporters of the autonomy. However neither the tactics of the Conservatives nor of the Radicals gave the appreciable results.

On September 7, 1914, at the secret meeting of the Lithuanian politicians it was decided to co-ordinate the activity of the political groups. It took more coherent shape since the foundation of the Committee of Lithuanian Representatives in the Dumas of Russia (November 1—2, 1914, chairman P. Leonas) and the Lithuanian War Relief Society (LDNKŠ, chairman of the Central Committee M. Yčas). However, soon after, it became evident that neither of the sides refused a wish to dominate. The odds were sharpened at the end of 1914 by renewed Lithuanian-Polish arguments (linguistic-church conflict in Vilnius), by the difference of opinions in the tactics in the relationship with Petersburg.

The Conservatives were of the same opinion — not to declare in public their political goals and with such a loyal attitude "to earn" the pay after the Russian victory. Although Petersburg promised nothing still they unofficially supported Lithuanian pretensions to Minor Lithuania and to a part of Suwalki province, rendered financial assistance to the LDNKŠ.

Meanwhile the Radicals suggested to demand firmly the political autonomy, to block the way to the confrontation inside Lithuanian society. For a combined philanthropic (The Lithuanian War Relief Society for Aid in Agronomy and Law) and political activity the LDP and LSDP tried to unite the efforts of Lithuanian Poles, Jews, Byelorussians with the forces of the democratic and socialist movements. While the Lithuanian Radicals were moving in this direction, 2 trends for seeking independence in Lithuania were revealed. The first one was related to the possibility of the revolution in Russia. The second foresaw to co-ordinate the question of Lithuania's political sovereignty with the affairs of the independence of Poland. On March 22—23, 1915, the consultations between the Lithuanian (M. Sleževičius [LDP], nonparty democrat J. Saulys, countrymen [Pol. *krajowcy*] M. Römeris, W. Abramowicz) and the Polish ("The Bloc of Independents") politicians took place in Warsaw. However the tendency of the Polish way

to the independence of Lithuania, which pretended virtually to found new geopolitical power by combined form of federal or confederal state did not gain the upper hand in it. The LDP and the LSDP further inclined to Russia (eventually to democratic).

Failures at the front in the summer of 1915 forced Russia to modify its policy with respect to the western edges (borders). Upon the intention to interfere with Berlin's attempts to expand a wedge between Warsaw and Petrograd, it activated the discussions about the liberalization programme in the Vistula provinces (in July) and turned for some social and political concessions to the Polish element in the North-Western area.

Exploiting this situation, *krajowcy* and Lithuanian landowners initiated the foundation of the "Civil Committee of Vilnius—Kauņas provinces" which should have represented the interests of citizens under the German occupation. Emphasizing the principle of civil confidence the organizers of the Committee called Lithuanian, Byelorussian and Jewish representatives for common labour bearing in mind the possibility to turn the Committee into a so called state organization.

When it turned out that the Committee majority includes those Polish, Jewish and Byelorussian statesmen who constantly co-operated with the Lithuanian Democratic Party, the latter also agreed to delegate its representatives to the Committee. This position of the Democrats was also settled by the fact that since M. Sleževičius, M. Januškevičius and other supporters of the revolutionary way, left for Russia, initiative in the party was overtaken by the supporters of joining the Polish side at the head with J. Vileišis.

The LDP encouraged the LSDP, the Nationalists Party, the Christian Democrats to follow their example. The latter have already agreed to a compromise to turn the LDNKŠ Central Committee (CK) into the institution eventually representing the Lithuanians and Lithuania (A. Janulaitis, S. Kairys, P. Bugailiškis, M. Biržiška became members of the LDNKŠ CK on September 22, 1915) and considered the "Civil Committee" as an organization reflecting any ethno-political orientation of the Lithuanian movement. However, on September 23, the Lithuanians adopted a resolution by compromise: to delegate the representatives of both groups to the "Civil Committee" and also to establish a secret centre which would co-ordinate the political activities of the Lithuanians.

Though after the beginning of the war the Petrograd—Berlin axis broke, continuous attempts to revive it were made. The German—Russian diplomatic game of the Polish card from 1914 to 1917 also served this purpose. After Germany raised the concept of the Polish restitution (the speech of Chancellor T. Bethmann-Hollweg in Reichstag on August 19, 1915) as a balance to the pan-Slavism idea, applied with respect to Poland by Russia, there

appeared at least a theoretical change to make a separate peace between the Romanov and Hohenzollern empires. Its realization depended upon the definite circumstances: the situation at the front, the arrangement of power in the leading spheres of empires and the relations with the allies. In this situation there appeared various implications, which directly involved Lithuania.

Having occupied the western edges of Russia in the autumn of 1915, Germany was bound not to strain the relations between Poland and Russia but to incline the latter to a separate peace. That is why in the Oberost area created on September 4 (Courland, Lithuania, Suwałki, Grodno, Białystok military areas), the Germans were carrying out "liberal" national policy in the junction of 1915—1916.

They turned the very area, virtually corresponding to the boundaries of the GDL of 1795, into the means of provoking Russia (upon the instructions of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs to its diplomatic corps in the neutral states), which allowed to profiteer the annihilated rights of Poland and Lithuania and conceal its intentions for annexation. At this period, Lithuanian policy demonstrated its receptivity to the outside influence once again; on the other hand, also its lack of immunity to outside influence.

Both the Conservatives and the Radicals raised the issue of the former Lithuanian state rights of inheritance with the help of the GDL restoration projects-appeals. It was an independent action. In Kaunas on January 6, 1916, the conservative group at the head with S. Banaitis published "The Postulates" and "The Constitutional foundation of self-governed Grand Duchy of Lithuania" in the name of "The General Lithuanian Public Committee". J. Vileišis, J. Šaulys, A. Janulaitis alongside with Byelorussian, Polish and Jewish democrats and socialists in Vilnius on December 19, 1915 and in February, 1916 published "The Universal" and the appeal "The Citizens" in the name of the GDL's Confederation Council. On the other hand, these activities objectively corresponded to German interests (Germans "helped" the Conservatives' project to appear in the foreign press) and the Radicals' project appealed to this openly.

The analysis of the Radicals' activities in the junction of 1915—1916 shows that the "liberal" course stimulated their break from the Conservatives and radical change in favour of German model of the GDL on the basis of reorganizing society (the activities of the democratic wing of the "Civil Committee", resourceful political activities of J. Šaulys). This tendency threatened the integrity of the Lithuanians in the political world.

On the other hand, the German "liberal" course was not consistent. The occupational administration did not give up "divide and rule" methods (the so called Vevey financial scandal, general

census of the population campaign on March 9—11, 1916), which escalated national conflicts, induced the split in the political forces of the country on ethnic basis (Lithuanian "Inteligentia Group for Consideration Lithuanian Affairs", "Byelorussian National Committee", "Polish Committee").

In the spring of 1916, the turning point in the Lithuanian politics became visible. At the end of April the "Inteligentia Group" was formed into a smaller "Lithuanian Diplomatic" group (J. Šaulys, A. Smetona, J. Basanavičius, P. Klimas, P. Dogelis, J. Vileišis, A. Janulaitis, A. Stulginskis, J. Stankevičius, J. Bakšys, S. Kairys, M. Biržiška). In May they entered into regular relations with Byelorussian statesmen: A. Luckievich, I. Luckievich, V. Lastouskii (the GDL Confederation Council, which on May 21, 1916, became the Lithuanian—Byelorussian Permanent Committee) and maintained them till 1917. Such character of practical activities is perceptible in the ideas about self-dependance of state system, of this period: Lithuania is prospective as an independent or autonomous state within ethnographic boundaries (Memorandum submitted on July 10, 1916, to the General Chief of the Eastern Front) or as Lithuanian—Byelorussian and eventually Latvian confederation—the GDL (the decisions adopted by the Lithuanian—Byelorussian Permanent Committee on July 4, 1916, and at the end of December the same year).

There is no doubt that the development of Lithuanian attitude is connected with the alteration of German policy in Lithuania. In the spring of 1916, when Russia displayed no interest in attempts for separate negotiations (H. Stinnes mission), there arose disagreements in Germany for the methods applied in the occupied territories. The General Military Staff in the East opposed to Berlin's Polish-like Vilnius—Warsaw formula (in April). By territorial reorganizations (on May 1, 1916, Vilnius and Suwalki areas were united) and ethnical purification policy (E. Ludendorff secret directives of June 27, 1916) it tried to strengthen Lithuanian and Byelorussian influence in Oberost at the expense of the Polish element backed up in Warsaw (Berlin). Irreconcilable contradictions in the spheres where the leadership belonged to the Germans had intensified political struggle in Lithuania for the domination in the country and had also increased antagonism between Lithuania and Poland.

Though Russia was not inclined to participate in separate negotiations, it was forced to take retaliatory measures against German insurrectional activities. Petrograd used all possible means to strengthen Russian-like line in the Lithuanian movement and to aim it against Lithuanian and Swiss lines which got in the German water-way.

Since the beginning of 1916 uncensored Lithuanian newspapers published in Russia wrote about Lithuanian autonomy. Financial subsidies to the LDNKŠ CK in Russia were increased. Lithuanian

radicals and conservatives accordingly felt the patronage of trudo-viks and kadets (Lithuanian Affairs Committee was established under Kadets CK on March 28, 1916). In June the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs helped M. Yčas who was involved in organizing "Lietuvių diena" (Lithuanian day) to get to the Pope. Upon the co-operation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and General Staff, Lithuanian statesmen disposed towards Russia were sent to the country.

Taking advantage of Russian—German sinuosities of practical policy the Lithuanians in May—July, 1916, entered into close relations with political centres active in Lithuania, Switzerland, Russia and the USA (on May 30—June 4, 1916, the first Lithuanian conference was held in Lousanne; on June 27—29, 1916, the third "Union of Nations" conference was held; on June 30—July 4, 1916, the second Lithuanian conference was held in Lousanne). This pure diplomacy demonstrated that the Lithuanians became the subject of international policy. On the other hand, this subject might be active only within the strictly limited boundaries of Russian and German interests.

In the autumn of 1916 — the spring of 1917, Germany attempted once again to force Russia into separate negotiations. Undelimited announcement of the Polish Kingdom (November 5, 1916), new speculations on Lithuanian—Courland statehood had to serve this purpose. In the latter case, the project of Lithuanian state restoration — "The Memorandum about the restoration of independent Lithuania" (the intentions to restore Lithuanian Kingdom within the boundaries of Vilnius, Kaunas, Grodno, Suwalki, Courland provinces, Minsk province Novgorod area, the northern part of Lomža province till Lik and Narev rivers were foreseen) — prepared by the Lithuanians in Switzerland was used and handed in on January 11, 1917, to the diplomats of Western countries and from them it appeared in the hands of the Russian government.

The support of Antante, secret French—Russian agreements on February 14 and 27, 1917, bilateral freedom concerning setting the eastern and western boundaries of the states allowed Petrograd to oppose German provocations. The Germans failed to eliminate Russia with either czarist or provisional governments from way. However, their pressure left remarkable effect upon the policy of Russia and also upon the Lithuanians acting in Russia. Provisional governments did not involve the Lithuanians in the process of state constitutional decentralization. This led to the split in the Lithuanian movement in Russia and weakened the Russian-like camp in it (June, 1917).

The deafness of Russia induced annexionalist tendencies towards Oberost in Germany. International events, the February revolution in Russia, involvement of Berlin into the war by the USA in April—May, 1917, forced to stop the annexational tac-

tics based on national principle *clausula*, which anticipated partial annexation of Lithuania and Courland. Going on these tactics, in Vilnius on September 18—23, a Council representing the Lithuanian nation was established. Appealing to the incapability of the Lithuanian nation to lead a state power the Germans hoped to break down its self-determination and force it to join Germany (November, 1917—February, 1918).

However, the Council due to the compromises made by the Radicals and Conservatives managed to legalize the Lithuanian statehood affair (the act from February 16, 1918, the acknowledgement of Kaiser on March 23, 1918) by successfully using the contradictions between German military and civil staff and international situation under the circumstances of the Bolshevik coup in Russia, and in April, 1918, to go on with the diplomatic struggle for the state power authorization.

On the other hand, the Germans managed to successfully go on to the joining policy. On March 3, 1918, when Germany created a separate peace with Bolshevik Russia, Lithuania gained the status of a country being under a strange power. It remained foreign to Reich though did not become a state, because it had no state power; German (strange) state power joined Lithuania to Germany.

The activities of the Council in the summer of 1918 opened the possibilities to look for definite forms of Lithuanian sovereignty. The constitution of monarchy was prepared (in June—July). On June 30, the agreement with the Polish Regent Council (A. Ronikier—A. Voldemaras agreement) was signed. On July 11, collateral to the Würtemberg dynasty, Count Urach is elected the King of Lithuania Mindaugas II. In June—July the presidium of the Council tried to establish contacts with the Polish part of society ("The League of Active Policy", "The Lithuanian Landowners Union" founded by F. Ropp). These actions of the Council should be estimated as a supposition of civil consolidation in Lithuanian society.

However, it is necessary to point out, that the above mentioned actions of the Council were inspired by German civil authorities and Reichstag. Planning to leave the edges torn away from Russia as a deposit to the Antante territorial claims and seeing the interest of the West in stable Eastern Europe, in the first half of 1918 *Auswärtiges Amt* (R. Kühlmann) and the majority of Reichstag (M. Erzberger and others) attempted to carry out a stabilization policy in the region: to stop German expansion in Russia, to refuse Balkanization methods in the Eastern policy, to adjust the so called state derivatives, to make their interests agree with theirs. To achieve these purposes dynastical combinations were employed. On April 15, 1918, upon the decision of Kaiser the crown of Poland had to be passed to the Würtemberg dynasty. Lithuanian attention was directed to the mentioned Urach.

If the representatives of the Württemberg dynasty were elected the monarchs of Poland and Lithuania there would have appeared a connection hopefully allowing to overcome complications in the Polish—Lithuanian relations. Thus a serious step would be made to accomplish the stabilization programme in Eastern Europe.

In the midsummer of 1918, a complicated situation at the western front forced the German government to change its policy with respect to the occupied eastern territories. P. Hintze, a new State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and General Military Staff went on to the realization of the conflict concept. At the end of August Berlin reverting to the Warsaw—Vilnius formula started to blackmail the Council. The latter having broken contacts with the Polish part of society, failed to balance the political interests of Lithuania and Lithuanians.

In the autumn of 1918, after the international situation changed, Germany modified its policy in Lithuania once again. For assistance in establishing the statehood of Lithuania, hoping to receive favours from the West, the Germans allowed the Council to form the Government (the application of Max von Baden of October 20). However, they planned to keep Lithuania under their influence and turn it into a limitrophic state.

At the end of October, 1918, Lithuanian Conservatives looked for support in the Antante camp though unsuccessfully. At the same time the Radicals insisted on negotiations with national minorities, tried to convene the conference of the whole country.

Though on November 11, the Council formed the government, the restoration of the state was not completed. In the circumstances of those times, the formation of the government was not related to the carrying out the state authorities' functions*.

* Translated by D. Žygelis.